

The Forbidden Thought

It was as predictable as sunrise that Senator Goldwater would react as he did to the news that a Central Intelligence Agency official has entertained the forbidden thought of a negotiated settlement in Viet Nam. The Republican nominee lost no time in fitting the report into his charges of "appeasement and disarmament" by the Johnson Administration. On the strength of it he predicts that the Administration is preparing to accept a "negotiated peace."

We think the Administration ought to be considering a peaceful settlement on the right terms, but the conclusion that it is doing so is hardly warranted by the CIA leak. In a routine working paper, Willard Matthias of the CIA Board of National Estimates dared to suggest that the Viet Nam conflict is "more a political contest than a military operation," that military victory might not be attainable, and that continued large-scale American aid might gain no more than a prolonged stalemate. These considerations, all supported by a decade of Viet Nameese history, led Mr. Matthias to the forbidden thought:

"There is also a chance that political evolution within the country and developments upon the world scene could lead to some kind of negotiated settlement based upon neutralization."

One of Senator Goldwater's favorite newspapers, the *Chicago Tribune*, got hold of the Matthias report and so the Administration

hastily made it public, along with elaborate assurances that it had never been presented to any policy-making bodies and did not reflect the official United States position. That is entirely credible. Nevertheless the Administration ought to be considering the possibility that Mr. Matthias mentions, along with others, even though it does not care to do so publicly in the midst of a political campaign.

The latest events in South Viet Nam underscore Mr. Matthias's point that "the situation remains very fragile." Fragile is a mild word for it when Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh, the military "strong man" the United States is backing, gives up the presidency to which he had promoted himself, and repeals the new Constitution he had imposed 10 days ago, because students and Buddhists demonstrated in the streets. Gen. Khanh is obviously trying to hang onto power in the face of an almost total lack of political support among the people. He is just about where Ngo Dinh Diem was before he was deposed.

In such a situation empty slogans of "can win" and "total victory" are no substitute for hard, realistic thought, including the thinking of forbidden thoughts like neutralization. The real choice toward which we are steadily being driven is between a negotiated settlement and a massive involvement of American troops in a long Asian land war with China. If the American people could make the choice, we have no doubt whatever what it would be.